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AUTHOR Leming, James S.
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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that teachers' sense of efficacy is an important presage variable associated with student achievement. Stereotypes evolving from this research include both positive and negative correlations between teacher perception of effectiveness and teaching experience. This research examines the relationship between years of teaching experience and a sense of efficacy as measured by teacher perception of external control (luck, fate, chance, etc.) and internal control (behavior that does have an effect). A low positive correlation was found between perception of effectiveness and years of experience. Alternative explanations are given for the findings and the need for further research is indicated. (Author/CJ)

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Efficacy and Experience: The Relationship Between Locus of Control and Years of Teaching Experience

James S. Leming
Curriculum, Instruction,
and Media
Southern Illinois University
at Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois, 62901

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that teachers' sense of efficacy is an important presage variable associated with student achievement. This research examines the relationship between years of teaching experience and a sense of efficacy as measured by the Rotter Internal-External scale. Two alternative views on the possible relationship between longevity in the teaching profession and a sense of efficacy are discussed. A low positive correlation (-.21) was found between a sense of efficacy and years of teaching experience. Alternative explanations for the findings were offered and the need for future research was indicated.

Efficacy and Experience: The Relationship Between Locus of Control and Years of Teaching Experience

There is reason to believe that teachers' feelings concerning their own efficacy may be one of the crucial variables associated with student achievement. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), in their significant and controversial study on the role of self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom, have pointed out the crucial role that teacher expectations can play in the intellectual development of children. More recently Brophy and Evertson (1976) in their report on the Texas Teacher Effectiveness Project identified a sense of efficacy as the most pervasive and fundamental of the presage variables correlating with teacher effectiveness. Both Armor et al (1976) and Berman et al (1977) have also reported a strong positive relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and student academic achievement.

With the current tight job market in education, educational staff are becoming increasingly more experienced in terms of mean years of teaching experience. It has been suggested that, overtime, professional life within institutions may have an impact upon individuals' sense of efficacy. In light of the importance of teachers' sense of efficacy on student achievement, and the nationwide trend toward increasingly experienced staff in public schools, this paper will explore the relationship between longevity in the teaching profession and a sense of efficacy among practicing teachers.

It is part of the conventional wisdom of public education that other things being equal experienced teachers have skills and expertise that beginning teachers lack. This belief is reflected in the public rationale behind salary schedules as well as in most districts' willingness to hire experienced teachers over inexperienced teachers if the money will allow. Summaries of the literature on locus of control, e. g. Lefcourt (1976) and Phares (1976), have indicated that a sense of mastery over the environment increases with age. Harvey (1971) for example, found that the longer a person held an administrative position in the upper echelons of government the higher the feelings of efficacy. Since experienced teachers generally have more power within the institutions they teach, and since they have had more time through trial and error and advanced training to develop effective teaching strategies, it is plausible to hypothesize that a teacher's sense of efficacy will increase with years of teaching experience.

On the other hand, rich stereotypes abound regarding the doddering old veteran who decades ago gave up on himself as an effective teacher and is biding his time until he can reap the fullest benefits from the retirement system. A number of analyses of the life of teachers in schools, e.g. Waller (1933), Sarason (1971), and Lortie (1975), have pointed out the limited freedom teachers experience in their professional roles and the behavioral conformity required by the institution and the community. It is generally the case that teachers have only minimal control over the conditions of their employment, the curriculum they are expected to teach, and the school rules they are expected to enforce. Conformity necessarily entails the feeling that others are in control. If, as Merton (1957) has suggested,

life in institutions can have an impact on individuals' basic personality orientations, then there is reason to suspect that a decreasing sense of efficacy might be associated with longevity in the teaching profession.

Consistent with this point of view the recent concern about teacher stress and teacher burn-out has implicated the working conditions of teachers as having a major impact on teacher personality and more specifically on teacher effectiveness.

Given these two contrasting positions on the relationship between experience and efficacy, and the significant role that teachers' sense of efficacy may have on student achievement, any discernable relationships are of major significance in terms of understanding the ability of schools to successfully carry out their goal of fostering the intellectual development of youth. To date no research has directly addressed this relationship between experience and efficacy. This research is an initial exploration of this significant area.

Method. Data was collected from 199 certified teachers from Long Island, New York who were attending graduate school at a major Long Island University. The teachers represented 60 different school districts and 95 different schools. The subjects were asked to indicate the number of years that they had been teaching as well as to fill out the Rotter (1966) Internal-External Scale.

The Rotter Internal-External (I-E) scale is a measure of generalized expectancy for the internal versus external control of reinforcement. A sense of external control is defined as seeing one's efforts to influence the world as useless; everything that happens is seen as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces around.

A sense of internal control is defined as seeing one's efforts to influence the world as having an effect, that is, what one gets in life is what one earns, rather than the result of luck, fate, chance, etc. It is assumed that the more internal the teacher's orientation, the stronger will be that teacher's feelings that through their efforts they can successfully exert control over the environment as it relates to their students' achievement. Rotter's scale is a 29 item forced choice instrument with six filler items to make the purpose of the test appear somewhat more ambiguous. Scores range on the internal-external scale from 23 to 0. The IE scale is scored for externality. The higher the score the more external the orientation, the lower the score the more internal the orientation.

Results. The mean score on the I-E scale was 11.47 with a standard deviation of 4.44. The range was from 2 to 21. The mean years of teaching experience for the sample 5.08 with a standard deviation of 4.90. The years of experience for the sample ranged from those who had just graduated and looking for their first job (n=9) to those with fifteen or more years experience (n=14). The Pearson product moment correlation of years of teaching experience with the I-E scale was -.21 ($p < .001$). Since the I-E scale is scored for externality this finding is to be interpreted as indicating that there exists a small but positive relationship between an internal sense of control and years of teaching experience.

Discussion. Although this research does not constitute strong evidence for the position that teachers' sense of efficacy increases with years of teaching experience it does suggest, at least with this sample, that the opposite is not the case. That is, based on these findings, it

can not be claimed that teachers become increasingly fatalistic (external) with increasing years of experience. One may speculate that the repressive aspects of school life for professionals have been overdrawn in educational literature; the stultifying aspects of school life have been accurately described, but teachers, by mechanisms currently not fully understood, manage to remain unaffected; or, teachers may well be affected by these factors, but since it is difficult to specify ideal conditions against which to measure current practices the extent of the impact is difficult to assess.

In teaching,one's anticipated effectiveness in interaction with the environment, especially with regard to student achievement, has been shown to shape reality in a self confirming manner. The nature of and extent to which life in schools impacts on such personality orientations as locus of control is of significant interest if we are to fully understand teacher development over the span of their careers. In an area related to student achievement such as locus of control, identification of developmental trends among teachers is a significant area for future inquiry.

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